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ABSTRACT

The concept of communicative competence, which has recently become so influential in language teaching, has resulted in a new emphasis on the nature of interaction. Questions concerning the communicative needs of language learners are raised with regard to the types of interaction they will participate in, the roles they will have, and the communicative acts they wish to perform. Innovations in language teaching that take communicative needs into account should be based on a description of communicative interaction and its various components. This paper is a contribution to that description. The concepts of status and role are defined and discussed, and the place of role in interaction is explored. The types of linguistic act which realize role are examined, and a brief passage from a French lesson is analyzed as an example of this approach to the description and definition of role. (CLK)

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INTERACTIONAL STRUCTURE : THE ROLE OF ROLE

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RESUME

L'orientation actuelle de la pédagogie des langues vers l'acquisition de la compétence de communication pose de manière aiguë le problème de la description de l'interaction verbale.

C'est dans le but de contribuer à l'établissement d'un système descriptif adéquat qu'est examinée et définie, dans cet article, la notion de ROLE interactif. Cette notion, distincte des notions sociologiques de STATUT et de PROFESSION est indispensable à une description de l'interaction verbale dans la mesure où, sans elle, un certain nombre de phénomènes interactifs tels que la distribution des tours de parole, la distribution des actes communicatifs, etc..., ne pourraient être pris en compte de manière satisfaisante. L'examen d'un exemple authentique d'échange verbal montre à l'évidence combien cette notion permet d'élargir la puissance explicative d'une théorie de l'interaction.

Ralph... lifted the shell on his knees and looked round the sun-slashed faces.
" There aren't any grown-ups. We shall have to look after ourselves. "
The meeting hummed and was silent.
" And another thing. We can't have everybody talking at once. We'll have to have 'Hands up', like at school. " He held the conch before his face and glanced round the mouth. " Then I'll give him the conch. "
" Conch ? "
" That's what this shell's called. I'll give the conch to the next person to speak. He can hold it when he's speaking. "
" But- "
" Look- "
" And he won't be interrupted. Except by me. "
Jack was on his feet. " We'll have rules ! " he cried excitedly.
" Lots of rules ! Then when anyone breaks 'em - "
" Whee - oh ! "
" Wacco ! "
" Bong ! "
" Doink ! "

From *The Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of communicative competence which has become so influential in language teaching in recent years has resulted in a new emphasis being placed on the nature of interaction. Teachers and textbook writers now ask themselves questions concerning the communicative needs of their learners : what types of interaction will they participate in, what will their roles be, what kinds of communicative act will they wish to perform ? Clearly, if we can predict the answers to these questions we will be in a position to make our teaching far more effective and efficient.

But before these very important practical problems can be tackled, we need to establish some kind of descriptive system. That is, before we can get down to specifying the particular communicative needs and objectives of a particular group of learners, we need some overall framework for the description of communicative interaction and of its various components. Once this general description has been carried out, we can apply it to the particular types of interaction in which learners will be required to participate.

This article is a contribution to that general description (see also HOLEC 1973, RILEY 1976) although, as we show in the sample passage we have taken for analysis, it is one that has immediate practical applications and implications for both the applied linguist and the classroom teacher.

I. STATUS and ROLE

In any interaction, the identities of the participants impinge on one another in a variety of different ways - physically, psychologically, socially and linguistically. As this process is one of enormous complexity, social scientists have tried to define and isolate the relevant variables, partly for descriptive purposes, of course, but partly simply to break the problem down into manageable chunks. Unfortunately, this compartmentalisation, however necessary, has resulted in a polarisation between the approaches of those disciplines (such as sociology, politics and economics) which focus on *social structure* and those (such as linguistics, psychology and ethology) which concentrate on *social behaviour*. Despite the existence of hybrid disciplines such as social psychology and sociolinguistics, there exists a considerable conceptual gap between the two extremes. In particular, those concepts which prove most valuable for describing social structures seldom seem to provide insights into the nature of interaction : indeed, such concepts and categories often do not even seem relevant to the description and understanding of interactive events. The reverse is also true : descriptions of interactive events carried out according to the procedures of, say, linguistics, very rarely provide the commentary on underlying social structures which the sociologist is looking for, being limited to a relatively superficial analysis of the communicative code. (Cf. CICOUREL, 1973).

A crucial example of this dichotomy is to be found in the literature on *status* and *role*. No definitions of these terms which are acceptable to, say, the sociologist, have ever been found of use to students of interaction, and vice-versa. So confusing have been the results of trying to impose the definitions of the one discipline on the objects of the other, that some researchers have seriously questioned their scientific validity, despite their generally-accepted intuitive and operational availability (e.g. COULSON 1972).

This seems to us rather like throwing out the baby with the bathwater, and in this paper we try to suggest why such confusion has arisen and, more ambitiously, what sort of model of social interaction might satisfy both students of social structure *and* students of social behaviour. We hope that we have done so with the minimum amount of damage to sociological sensibilities, but we would like to make it clear that our own interests lie strictly in the realms of discourse analysis and interaction : so that even if our definitions are rejected by the sociologists, we would claim that they still retain considerable internal validity as descriptions of formally observable behaviours.

The wide variety of definitions of status and role to be found in sociological discussion prevents us from doing more than sketching the main outlines of the debate :

Status is usually defined as a social position, as part of a structure. Many observers see it essentially as a feature of social order. Status relates the individual to the wider community with which he comes in contact, usually through other structures such as those based on kinship or occupation. Compared to role status is relatively stable and static, and it is more institutionalised. It is based on norms accepted by third parties and is therefore sometimes described as a collection of rights and duties.

Role is usually seen as more dynamic and consequently more fleeting than status. It operates over a narrower set of relations and is dependent on norms set and accepted by the participants themselves.

Many writers see the two terms as poles of an opposition between *most* and *least institutionalised* : indeed, for some, status is defined as " that class of roles which is institutionalised " (GOODE, 1960). However, even such a definition, susceptible as it is to an interactive approach, has failed to give rise to an investigation of those behaviours which might be regarded as bringing about the institutionalisation. Again, neither term, it has been noted, has given rise to a theory for describing behaviour which rests on the distinction between them.

Another problem over which much sociological ink has been spilt concerns the descriptive perspective : are status and role to be described from the *observer*'s or from the *actor*'s point of view ? In other words, to what extent should the observer's retrospective conceptualisations reflect the actor's options at successive points in the interaction ? Closely related to this is the problem of observer effect : to what extent is the description distorted by the observer's own prejudices (based on cultural differences between himself and the actor, for example) concerning role and status ?

Our attitude to these considerable theoretical problems is brutally pragmatic : since we hope that our work will eventually produce pedagogical spin-off, we opt firmly for an actor's view of interaction. A highly sophisticated theoretical model- no matter how much more exhaustive, elegant and powerful- is not nearly as valuable to us as one which takes advantage of the experiences and intuitions of the learner.

II. ROLE IN INTERACTION

It seems to us that the most promising point of departure for any investigator of interaction is the distinction which some writers draw between status as a collection or bundle of rights and duties (BANTON, 1965) and role as the enactment of those rights and duties. Though by no means universally accepted this approach has a number of advantages, in particular its potential for distinguishing between, yet accommodating, both structuralist and interactional perspectives, by placing status firmly in the purlieus of the former and role in the domain of the latter.

Of course, this approach can only be regarded as valid if we do indeed succeed in describing role in terms of interactive rights and duties. To do so, we need a model of discourse and interaction which goes beyond a relatively superficial categorisation of acts, which is able to link patterns of interactional behaviour with other aspects of social behaviour, and which is able to correlate *types of participation* (in terms of acts) with *types of participant* (in terms of social structures). This approach, then, is the reverse of the " sociological " approach, which tries to impose categories of social structure onto behaviour : rather, we set up categories of behaviour in their own right. Sometimes (though by no means always) our categories will be entirely congruent with those of the sociologist : when this happens, all well and good, but in general the correspondences between categories of social structure and categories of social behaviour provide insights into both sets of phenomena without conflating them.

It is for these reasons that we distinguish clearly between the sociological concept " status " and the socio*linguistic* and interactional concept " role ". Status lacks that dynamic and diachronic dimension which is necessary for relevance to interaction, although, along with other features of identity such as office and personality, it may be regarded as one of the parameters of role. Unfortunately, both in the technical literature on the subject and in everyday language, the two are often confused.

For us, then, role is to be understood and described as the enactment of privileges and duties, which may be either linguistic or non-linguistic. Non-

linguistic privileges include, for example, the right of a barman to pour the drinks in a pub : perhaps regrettably, the customer cannot simply help himself. Again, a policeman has the non-linguistic right to arrest people. Such non-linguistic rights are usually correlated with *office*, another parameter of role.

Linguistic privileges and rights, on the other hand, are to be understood and described as being enacted in discourse : they are rights which are realised by various types of linguistic act. It goes without saying that the only way of isolating these linguistic acts is through the analysis of communicative interaction, since there is no one-to-one relationship between units of interaction and units of social structure.

III. PARAMETERS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY : OFFICE, STATUS AND ROLE

Before proceeding to investigate the types of linguistic act which realise role, let us summarise and exemplify the set of distinctions we have drawn : these concern the three parameters of *social identity* which have been labelled office, status and role :

By **Office,** we mean that class of positions in the social structure which is usually ascribed by appointment, attainment or professional qualification.

Status is a more general term for a position in the social structure which is defined by a number of parameters of which office (although often the most important) is only one : others may include such things as wealth, personality and religion.

Role is the enactment of interactional privileges and duties which are realised by certain types of act. In very general terms, these acts fall into two main categories : *illocutionary* or communicative acts (AUSTIN, 1971, HOLEC, 1973, SEARLE, 1969) and *interactive* or discursive acts. Illocutionary acts include persuading, forbidding, agreeing, inviting and so on. Interactive acts include taking and giving the floor, interrupting, opening/replying/closing in an exchange, and so on. (N.B. Although both illocutionary acts and interactive acts are clearly equally important as realisations of role privileges, in this article we will focus almost exclusively on the interactive acts).

It is clearly essential to distinguish role from *participant*, even though a role can only be enacted by a participant. A given role *may* depend on " outside " parameters such as status, office, personality and religion : but a banker may

or may not be tight-lipped, or a generally respected member of the community may or may not be talkative, so that their interactive roles cannot be automatically deduced from either office or status.

As an example, let us take three labels which are used indiscriminately for office or status or role : " doctor ", " priest ", and " teacher ". Their offices are conferred by virtue of their possessing the recognised qualifications. Their status in society will usually be consistently linked with their office, but will also be subject to the influence of a number of other factors, which may be religious or economic, for example, but which may also relate to such factors as their perceived professional standing : a village G.P. and a Harley Street specialist may have an identical office, but they most certainly do not have identical status.

Again, similar status may be ascribed to the doctor, a faith-healer, a herbalist and a pharmacist, and there is the important point that we often talk about the doctor, the teacher and the priest in a village having " the same status ", which clearly shows a use of the term which is separable from office.

When the doctor, the teacher and the priest perform those acts which are usually only performed by people holding a certain office, — removing appendices, marrying people, marking examination papers, — it is very easy to conflate or confuse office, status and role, since there is a close " downwards " congruence or overlapping between the three categories. Yet it is not difficult, even with such seemingly clear-cut examples, to find aspects of role which are shared by all three, and which therefore cannot be said to be distinguishing characteristics of office or status : they are role-behaviours and it is in these terms that roles should be categorised.

For example, all three might clearly indicate that an interaction (a consultation, let us say) is closed by saying, " Right, well that's all for now, but mind you follow my advice ". It is their discursive privilege to terminate such encounters which interests us here, since it shows that a role-behaviour may be common to several statuses and offices. Unless we describe role-behaviour in its own terms, we fail to account for these important distinctions.

One special sub-class of offices merits special mention : certain offices, instead of conferring the rights to perform non-linguistic acts, like arresting, confer the right to perform a certain class of linguistic acts. In some cases, these are the *performatives* discussed by Austin (1971) but at least as often they are acts of *discourse control*. Such an office is held by the Speaker of the House of Commons, who has the right to declare sittings open and closed, to nominate

speakers and to limit their speaking turns and the lengths of their speeches. The quotation from the Lord of the Flies which precedes this discussion is a perceptive comment on the operation of such an institution, where rights of address are given an objective correlative on the conch shell.

Since the negotiation for discourse control is, in varying degrees, a feature of a wide range of types of interaction, (e.g. T.V. interviews, the language of the classroom, argument), it is only in those cases where the institutional authority is recognised by all participants that we can say for certain that we are dealing with rights and privileges conferred directly by office. It is typical of such offices that they are highly formalised and their privileges are usually strictly codified. Where this is not the case, the only reliable solution is to observe the actual discourse behaviour and to derive our categories from the data.

IV. CATEGORIES OF LINGUISTIC ACT : REALISATIONS OF ROLE

As we saw earlier, linguistic acts fall into two main categories : illocutionary (or ' communicative ' or ' speech ') acts, and interactive (or ' discursive ') acts. In very general terms, illocutionary acts can be regarded as a reflection of the actor's intention in performing that particular act : inviting, refusing, agreeing, etc. Sequences of illocutionary acts give us illocutionary structure, and, as we shall see, the distribution of such acts between different types of participant provides considerable insights into the nature of role. For the moment, let us simply emphasize the fact that the roles implied by illocutionary acts, such as *commanding*, are illocutionary roles, such as *commander*. They are not directly related to either status or office, though there may be extremely interesting correlations. They may, on the other hand, be directly related to participant : by stating the repertoire of a given participant's illocutionary acts in a given interaction, we are describing an important constituent of role in that interaction.

By interactional (or " discursive ") acts we mean those acts which realise and impose the interactive structure of the discourse. Fundamentally the interactive structure is to be understood and described in terms of who speaks to whom and when, that is, in terms of turns and their relative distribution. Basically, a turn is communicative behaviour which enters into the structure of the discourse. If a participant's contribution is unheard or deliberately ignored, it is not a turn. Turns may be realised both verbally and non-verbally : a nod of the head or the utterance " yes " can both realise a turn.

In those types of interaction which we have been studying, turns fall into three main categories : Opening (O), Replying (R) and Closing (C). This sub-

categorisation of turn is based on the concept of **address** : by Address we mean that a speaker selects another participant or participants and imposes on him/them the right/duty to reply. Address may be realised verbally or non-verbally (RILEY 1976) ; in small-group interaction it is almost exclusively non-verbal, being realised by eye-contact, gesture and orientation. An *Opening* turn (O) is one in which a Speaker (S) imposes on one or more other participants the right/duty to reply : they are the Speaker's Addressees (A). When the Addressee avails himself of his right, his turn is a *Reply* (R) (The Addressee of an R-turn being, by definition, the Speaker of the previous turn). An O followed by an R gives us the minimum unit of interaction, the *Exchange*.

Once an exchange is completed, the Speaker (i.e. the producer of the O turn) can either initiate a new exchange with the same participant, or he can change Address, i.e. select a new Addressee, or he can perform a Closing turn, one in which no duty to reply is imposed. Change of Address and Closing both mark the boundary of the next-higher unit of interaction, the Transaction, which therefore has the structure O, R $_{(l.....n)}$ C

When we talk about discourse rights and privileges, then, we are referring in particular to the rights to perform Os, Rs and Cs, to the right to Address and to the right to Interrupt. These rights vary considerably from interaction to interaction and from participant to participant : by stating the repertoire of a given participant's interactive acts, that is the types of turns he performs, we are describing a second important constituent of his role.

V. ROLE IN INTERACTION : AN EXAMPLE

As an example of this approach to the description and definition of role, let us take a brief passage for analysis. The passage in question, which is authentic, is an extract from a lesson being given by a teacher of French to a group of immigrant workers. The demands we make on our analysis and our model are stiff ones : can we, by describing the discourse, make generalisations about the teacher's role and the students' roles in this type of interaction ?

In this passage, the teacher was preparing a dialogue with his group : this target discourse was : " Tiens, bonjour Bashir "
" Bonjour, Iovan "

(Bashir and Iovan are names of characters in the text book).

PASSAGE

Turn 1. Teacher : Ça va, je commence maintenant. « Tiens, bonjour Bashir ». Tu es Iovan, Ali.

Turn 2. Student : « Tiens, bonjour bashir ».

Turns 3/4. Teacher : Très bien. Maintenant Bashir dit à Iovan : « Bonjour Iovan ». Tu es Bashir.

Turn 5. Student 2 : « Bonjour, tiens bonjour Iovan ».

Turn 6. Teacher : Il ne dit pas « tiens », c'est Iovan qui dit « tiens bonjour Bashir ». Maintenant Bash' dit simplement « bonjour ».

Turn 7. Student 2 : « Bonjour ».

Turn 8. Teacher : Il s'appelle comment ?

Turn 9. Student 3 : Iovan.

Turn 10. Teacher : (Gesture to student 2 to try again).

Turn 11. Student 2 : « Bonjour Iovan ».

Turns 12/13. Teacher : Très bien. Alors, tu es Iovan, tu es Bashir, Allez-là.

Turn 14. Student 4 : « Tiens, bonjour Bashir ».

Turn 15. Teacher : Bashir.

Turn 16. Student 5 : « Bonjour, Iovan ».

Turn 17. Teacher : Très bien.

ILLOCUTIONARY STRUCTURE

1. *Framing* Ça va ? *Performative* Je commence maintenant. *Modelling* « Tiens, bonjour Bashir ». *Nominating* Tu es Iovan, Ali.
2. *Practicing*
« Tiens, bonjour Bashir ».
3. *Evaluating*
Très bien.
4. *Modelling* Maintenant Bashir dit à Iovan, « bonjour Iovan ». *Nominating* Tu es Bashir.
5. *Practicing*
« Bonjour, tiens, bonjour Iovan ».
6. *Correcting*
Il ne dit pas « tiens », c'est Iovan qui dit « tiens, bonjour Bashir ».
Maintenant Bashir dit simplement « bonjour... »
7. *Practicing*
« Bonjour... »
8. *Correcting*
Il s'appelle comment ?
9. *Informing*
Iovan.
10. *Nominating*
[NVC : address and gesture]
11. *Practicing*
« Bonjour Iovan ».
12. *Evaluating*
Très bien.
13. *Nominating* Alors tu es Iovan, tu es Bashir. *Directing* Allez-là.
14. *Practicing*
« Tiens bonjour Bashir ».
15. *Nominating*
Bashir.
16. *Practicing*
« Bonjour Iovan ».
17. *Evaluating*
Très bien.

INTERACTIONAL STRUCTURE

Participant \ Turn	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Teacher	S	A	S	S	A	S	A	S	A	S	A	S	S	A	S	A	S
Student 1	A	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
Student 2	H	H	H	A	S	A	S	H	H	A	S	H	H	H	H	H	H
Student 3	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	A	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
Student 4	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	A	S	H	H	H
Student 5	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	A	H	A	S	H

O R C O R O R O R O R C O R O R C

Ex. Ex. Ex. Ex. Ex. Ex. Ex.

Trans. Transaction Transaction

Legend : S = Speaker A = Addressee H = Hearer

0 = Opening (A Speaker turn in which (a) participant(s) is addressed i.e. the duty to reply is imposed on him).

R = Reply

C = Closing (A Speaker turn performed by the same participant as the 'O', but in which no duty to reply is imposed).

Before proceeding with our interpretations of these two analyses, we would like to make two points :

(i) for the sake of argument, we ask the reader to accept the fiction that it is possible to make valid generalisations on the basis of such a small 'corpus' ;

(ii) we are well aware of the inadequacy of the labels we have used for the illocutionary acts : only after far more analyses of this type have been carried out will we have a more reliable taxonomy, and even then operational consistency (i.e. different observers using the same labels for the same acts) will probably be the most we can hope for, since our present state of knowledge does not allow of a rigorous definition of such acts. Our ignorance of the hie-

rarchical ordering of illocutionary values is an especially serious handicap : in the passage in question, for example, should " Evaluating " and " Correcting " be related to some macro-function such as " Judging " ? Or is " Nominating " more closely related to " Performing " (Specifying an Addressee) or to " Directing " ?

Turning to the Illocutionary Structure of this passage as shown in our suggested analysis, we are struck first by the preponderance of Teacher-Acts. Note that this is not the same thing as Teacher-*talk*, which has always been measured in purely quantitative, chronological terms. The realisations of acts may be of very different lengths (compare 6 and 8, for example). Nonetheless, the ratio of Teacher Acts to Student Acts in this passage is exactly the same as that generally given for Teacher Talk to Student Talk, i.e. 2 to 1 : of the 22 acts in this passage, 15 are performed by the teacher, 7 by the students. If we look at the passage in terms of types of act, we see that the teacher performs seven different types (Framing, Performing, Modelling (2x), Nominating (5x), Evaluating (3x), Correcting (2x) and Directing), whereas the students perform only two types of act (Practicing (6x) and Informing).

As can be clearly seen, almost all the Teacher Acts involve some form of control over the learner's behaviour. The importance of this aspect of role is underlined by the fact that *none* of the types of act performed in this passage are common to both teacher and student. Nothing could be a clearer example of role as the rights to perform acts. The reader is invited to test this against his own experience : it is just unimaginable that in a traditional class such as this, one of the students should start Evaluating or Correcting, or indeed performing any of the acts performed here by the teacher. He simply would not have the right : it is not his role.

When we examine the interactional structure of this passage, we are immediately struck by the Teacher's degree of discourse control. This is directly related to his right of Address : he and he alone can select speakers. The students cannot initiate an exchange, they have to wait until they are Addressed : their right to interrupt is correspondingly non-existent. They have extremely limited rights of Address. They cannot even Address one another, they can only Address the teacher. Consequently, only he can produce Opening and Closing turns. One consequence of this is his centrality : since all the discourse must go via the teacher, his share will be far greater than that of the students. All decisions concerning the activity are in his hands — when to begin and end a new phase of some kind, selection of participants, specification of their par-

ticipation. The teacher's task of classroom management is clearly reflected in his task of discourse management. The most direct form of role-challenge possible in this situation would be to try to wrest the control of the discourse away from the teacher, which explains why teachers have traditionally been so opposed to " talking in class ". Of course, role is relationship : the norms on which the behaviour we have been studying rests have to be accepted by all participants. The roles of teacher and student, that is, are mutually defining because, we would claim, they are defined by and in interaction.

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